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## **One Million Degrees Honors 200 Community College Scholar Graduates**

*Mayor Emanuel, Chancellor Salgado celebrate student achievements, point to future success*

**Chicago, IL, July 9, 2018**—[One Million Degrees](#) (OMD) honored 200 graduates from 10 Chicago-area community colleges on June 19 at its annual Scholar Awards Night as Mayor Rahm Emanuel said he is “so proud of what you have accomplished.” As OMD Scholars move forward to a four-year college or begin a promising career, Emanuel, keynote speaker for the capstone event, said: “I am 100% positive about the City of Chicago because of what I see in this room.”

The Scholar Awards, held at Chase Bank Auditorium, where graduates were joined by families and supporters, recognize the achievements of Chicago area community college Scholars – highly-motivated, high-potential students at the seven City Colleges of Chicago and three suburban colleges. They often face a range of financial and personal hurdles in their path to graduation. In highly personal remarks to the graduates, Emanuel cited his own health and career setbacks, and cautioned the Scholars to expect further challenges that will define “what you are made of.” Praising the comprehensive range of OMD supports to help students succeed in school, work and in life, Emanuel urged the graduates: “Take everything One Million Degrees has given you, and now show the rest of the world. You are walking through the door of opportunity. The best thing you can do is to reach back, help someone who has stumbled, and pull them through.”

The value of OMD to community college students, together with opportunities for deeper engagement, was highlighted by Chancellor Juan Salgado of City Colleges of Chicago. “Every time I run into students, I hear that ‘OMD was the difference-maker for me,’” he said. Over the past year, One Million Degrees expanded its commitment to support Chicago area community college students through OMD Works, an initiative to create partnerships, including apprenticeships, with employers to identify and meet growing demands for workers. “We plan to grow the apprenticeship program with OMD,” Salgado said.

OMD is the only organization in Illinois exclusively focused on surrounding community college students with the essential supports – mentoring, tutoring, professional development, and a financial stipend – to help them excel academically, complete their degrees, and launch their careers. In the 2018-2019 academic year, OMD will serve up to 800 scholars across all of its program locations, including all seven campuses of the City Colleges of Chicago, Harper College, Prairie State College, and South Suburban College.

Scholar of the Year Ashanti Buie, a first-generation college graduate of Kennedy-King College, who will enroll at Elmhurst College in the Fall with a full-tuition scholarship, spoke of the crucial assistance OMD provided during personal and family struggles. “OMD always had my back and my best interests at heart,” she said. She encouraged graduates “to get involved, stay committed, and squeeze some laughter out of every situation.” For Scholar Alumni Speaker Selena Torres, a graduate of Harry S. Truman College now studying engineering at the University of Illinois and advocating for women in STEM careers, OMD helped create a network of support. “Because of them, I found purpose in life,” she said.

Also honored at the ceremony were:

- Jennifer Galan, Most Improved Scholar, from Harold Washington College
- Luis Gonzales, Staff Member of the Year, Program Coordinator, Harry S. Truman College
- Katie Dorpinghaus, One in a Million Award, Finance and Data Analytics Manager
- Diana Alfaro, Coach of the Year, who works at DePaul University

The event capped another year of achievements for OMD. The organization supported a record 800 Scholars this year. Preliminary research from the University of Chicago Urban Labs shows that One Million Degrees significantly increases students’ full-time enrollment and persistence at Community Colleges of Chicago in the first year. OMD won Impact Grants Chicago’s \$100,000 Impact grant, which will fund technology platforms to support staff and 600 volunteer coaches. And, OMD raised a record \$792,000 at its 11<sup>th</sup> annual Degrees of Impact gala in early June.

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**About One Million Degrees:** One Million Degrees is the only organization in Illinois and one of few in the country dedicated to providing comprehensive supports to low-income, highly motivated community college students to help them succeed in school, in work, and in life. From tutors and coaches to financial assistance and professional development, OMD offers the support that empowers scholars to transform their lives and those around them for generations.

OMD Scholars graduate at twice the state average with the skills and experiences necessary to launch economically mobile careers. OMD partners with 10 Chicago-area community colleges, including the seven City Colleges of Chicago, College of Lake County, Harper College, and Prairie State College, and plans to serve 800 Scholars in the 2018-19 academic year. To learn more about One Million Degrees, please visit: [www.onemilliondegrees.org](http://www.onemilliondegrees.org).